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11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Your visit to Burundi comes as the country grapples with the many challenges facing nascent democracies.

The last remaining rebel group, the PALIPEHUTU-FNL, signed a cessation of hostilities agreement in May following several weeks of violent attacks that left over 100 people dead; the troublesome details of a permanent peace agreement are being negotiated and demobilization of the rebels is underway. The painstaking negotiations between the Government of Burundi (GOB) and the PALIPEHUTU-FNL are further complicated by the upcoming 2010 elections, as each side vies for support from overlapping Hutu constituencies. In addition to the PALIPEHUTU-FNL and the ruling CNDD-FDD party, political parties from across the spectrum are staking out strong positions in advance of only the second round of post-conflict elections. The "winner take all" politicking has also greatly affected the National Assembly, and CNDD-FDD parliamentarians ended a one-year plus legislative stalemate through a constitutionally questionable dismissal of 22 uncooperative lawmakers in June (ref A). The National Assembly has functioned normally since the dismissals.

12. (SBU) Burundi must also meet the challenges of addressing a rising HIV/AIDS problem, developing a post-conflict economy in a country with few natural resources, ending widespread corruption at every level, continuing democratization, demobilization, and security sector development, and improving healthcare, education and its human rights record. The GOB has taken a major step towards becoming a larger player in African affairs by contributing troops to the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM). END SUMMARY.

PALIPEHUTU-FNL at odds with GOB

14. (SBU) Despite a 2006 cease-fire agreement, the PALIPEHUTU-FNL launched a series of mortar and rocket attacks in and around Bujumbura in April, leading to clashes with GOB forces that left more than 100 dead. A measured and militarily successful GOB counterattack, combined with international pressure and an ultimatum that the rebels return to talks or face expulsion from their Tanzanian refuge, brought the PALIPEHUTU-FNL back to negotiations in the capital in May. The parties signed an agreement declaring an immediate cessation of hostilities May 26, but still face significant stumbling blocks before a lasting peace is achieved. While over 2400 rebel combatants reported to a containment camp on July 21, they handed over less than 40 weapons to their African Union guards, a gesture seen as disingenuous by the GOB and many international observers. It would be helpful if you would encourage Burundian government officials to finalize negotiations with the PALIPEHUTU-FNL to ensure a durable peace and set the stage for free, fair and

transparent elections in 2010.

Demobilization and Security Sector Reform

15. (SBU) The World Bank has pressed Burundi to reduce its ethnically-balanced military from 27,500 to 25,000 troops and its police force from 18,000 to 15,000. At the same time, as part of the peace deal, the GOB will likely agree to integrate a large portion of the largely Hutu PALIPEHUTU-FNL into the already-overlarge security forces (while the PALIPEHUTU-FNL claims 15,100 combatants, most observers put the number closer to 5,000). Maintaining the constitutionally-mandated ethnic quotas in the security forces and finding livelihoods for those who will be demobilized will pose significant problems. The primary funding source for demobilization comes from the Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program funded by the World Bank and other bilateral donors; these funds are due to expire at the end of 2008.

16. (SBU) Professionalization of the security forces is also critical, as significant numbers of the police and army are former rebels themselves and have received little formal security training. While the Dutch and the UN in particular are assisting police and military leadership in developing their professional capacities, further support and attention would likely lead to increased stabilization in post-conflict Burundi.

AMISOM

17. (SBU) With significant U.S. support, in late 2007 the GOB deployed an 850-strong battalion on its first ever overseas mission in support of AMISOM. The battalion, and three additional battalions which will augment/relieve the first battalion, received extensive training through the State Department-financed Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA) program. A second battalion is scheduled to deploy before the end of the fiscal year, and is currently awaiting delivery of additional equipment.

Democracy Challenges

18. (SBU) Upcoming 2010 Presidential and Parliamentary elections are profoundly affecting politics and political discourse in Burundi. Generating political dialogue among the GOB, civil society and political parties at this early stage could help prevent potentially devastating consequences (including the violent aftermath that plagued Kenya), which could occur as a result of poorly planned and executed elections. There is a genuine need to educate political parties, security forces and the general public on their roles, responsibilities and reasonable expectations during and after a democratic election. PALIPEHUTU-FNL demobilization, the return of tens of thousands of refugees who dispute ownership of long-abandoned plots, significant hikes in food and fuel prices, and a fractious political climate are genuine causes of concern in the run-up to 2010. The GOB has published guidelines for a re-established independent Electoral Commission, but has so far failed to name any candidates. It would be helpful if you would urge your GOB interlocutors to quickly name and approve a truly independent Electoral Commission to ensure free and fair elections.

HIV/AIDS

19. (SBU) The prevalence of HIV infection has increased from 3.5% in 2002 to 4.2% in 2007, and more than 265,000 of Burundi's 800,000 orphans are the result of HIV/AIDS. Data from antenatal clinics show a sharp spike in infection rates among patients aged 15 - 24; infection levels doubled from 8.6% in 2004 to 15.5% in 2005. U.S. programs, valued at \$3.1

million, have been implemented in three provinces and urban Bujumbura, reaching 2.4 million people in a country of eight million. The Department of Defense is also providing testing and consultation services to Burundian military personnel; a clinic is planned in the near future. As the only bilateral donor implementing comprehensive programming, the U.S. provides anti-retroviral treatment, care and support, prevention education, and system strengthening. However, Burundi receives significantly lower levels of PEPFAR funding than neighbors Tanzania, Rwanda, Zambia, Kenya, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, risking Burundian lives and regional reinfection.

Refugee returns taxing scant resources

¶10. (SBU) According to UNHCR, over 42,000 refugees have returned to Burundi in 2008 following the closure of several refugee camps in Tanzania. This return has proved difficult for the GOB to accommodate due to the country's scant national resources, and has prompted increasing conflict over land ownership in densely populated Burundi. While the majority of the refugees fled ethnic conflict in Burundi in 1993, more than 5,000 recent returnees have lived outside Burundi since the ethnic violence of 1972. The Government of Tanzania has offered citizenship to the 1972 group still residing in Tanzania, but more than 40,000 individuals have opted to return, often without land, family or even the language of their native Burundi. UNHCR expects that up to 90,000 refugees from 1972 and 1993 will return in the next two years as the UNHCR closes out its camps in Tanzania.

National Assembly Functioning Again

¶11. (SBU) After a year-plus stalemate in the National Assembly that created significant public frustration and ill-will, the Parliament is once again functioning normally. The dismissal of 22 CNDD-FDD parliamentarians that supported deposed CNDD-FDD party president Hussein Radjabu rather than President Nkurunziza broke the legislative deadlock, but was constitutionally questionable and widely criticized by politicians and NGOs.

Economy, Business Development and Education

¶12. (SBU) Burundi is one of the poorest countries in the world. Per capita GDP in the Maryland-sized nation is approximately \$118, and Burundi recently ranked 167 out of 177 in the UN's Human Development Index. The mainstay of the Burundian economy is agriculture, which accounts for almost half of GDP. Approximately 90 percent of the labor force is dependent on subsistence farming. The main cash crop, coffee, accounts for more than half of export earnings. Other principal exports include tea, sugar and raw cotton. USAID is the lead donor coordinating private sector development, and is active in developing the specialty coffee and agribusiness sectors, as well as providing increased access to microfinancing. USAID focuses on agribusiness, and developing Burundi's potential for generating income and employment for the agriculture-based population.

¶13. (SBU) In order to support Burundi's higher education initiatives, USAID is funding a partnership between the University of Ngozi and a U.S. Land Grant University. The to-be-chosen U.S. university will help the University of Ngozi establish links with Burundian agribusiness entrepreneurs and improve Burundian capacity to conduct agricultural research.

Widespread Corruption

¶14. (SBU) The local NGO, Association Fighting against Corruption and Public Funds Embezzlement (OLUCOME), recently listed 2629 cases of government corruption since 2002 that it believes have resulted in a loss of more than \$250 million in public funds. The two most high-profile corruption cases are

the sale of the Presidential plane in 2006 to a low-bidder (ref B) and the irregular payment to oil-importing company Interpetrol in summer of 2007 (ref C). Although a Parliamentary Commission has been set up to investigate the opaque circumstances surrounding the sale of the Presidential plane, no one has yet been charged nor has the Commission released any findings. In the aftermath of the Interpetrol scandal, the Governor of the Central Bank was arrested and awaits charges in prison; the Minister of Finance fled the country and is subject to an Interpol red alert.

Human Rights

¶15. (SBU) NGOs maintain that the GOB needs considerable improvement in its human rights record, particularly as it transitions out of a post-conflict situation. Army, police, and intelligence services are accused of abuses, including rape, torture, arbitrary arrest, beatings, murder and corruption. PALIPEHUTU-FNL combatants have also been accused of a wide variety of offenses, including extortion, theft, rape and murder. Local NGO Ligue Iteka reported that 71 individuals were killed by security forces in 2007, although that figure has yet to be verified. Human Rights Watch also published a 40-plus page report this year that accuses the intelligence services of torturing over 21 alleged PALIPEHUTU-FNL sympathizers in 2007. A bill to give women the same inheritance rights as men sits stalled in the National Assembly with little political support for its passage.

WAGNER